

EUROREG

Regions, minorities and European integration:

A case study on Muslim minorities (Turks and Muslim Bulgarians) in the SCR of Bulgaria



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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to assess the impact of the European regional policy and the European integration of Bulgaria on the political mobilisation, social-economic status and the perception of two compact Muslim groups – Turks and Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks), who are the local majority in the Kardzhali and Smolyan districts of the South Central Region of Bulgaria – about their place within united Europe.

Two basic factors influence the changes in the two districts, namely: the liberalisation of minority rights and the restructuring of the local economy. These factors stimulate the political and cultural mobilisation of the two Muslim minorities, change their economic status, and create new foundations for their attitude towards the state and the Bulgarian national majority. The penetration of the pre-accession funds in the region has been perceived in the same context: as part of the new political situation, and yet, it is probably too early to assess their overall impact.

The results of the fieldwork show that the members of the local elites tend to idealize the situation in the region. The “ideal” model they wish to achieve is characterised by: extensive regional co-operation, support for decentralisation, as well as increasingly institutionalised regional-local alliances *across* political parties and *across* national-ethnic communities; local-subnational government increasingly operating as a representative of the region rather than of the ethnic or national community; minority-majority interests and politics defined by growing convergence around economic and regional development objectives; declining politicisation of cultural identity issues and their re-orientation away and dissociation from the state; widespread identification with Europe, with the EU seen as an entity where various cultural identities can flourish and primarily as a source of more efficient government, economic competence and regional competitiveness.

1. Introduction

The focus of the research is on two compact Muslim groups in Bulgaria: Turks and Muslim Bulgarians (Pomaks), living in the Kardzhali and Smolyan districts of the South Central Region of Bulgaria, near the Greek border. The objective is to assess the impact of the European regional policy and the forthcoming European integration of Bulgaria on the political mobilisation, social-economic status and the perception of the two Muslim minorities of their place within united Europe.

As European integration represents a part of large-scale historical changes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe over the last fifteen years, it is necessary to outline other internal and external factors which influence the ongoing processes in the border regions with a predominant Muslim (Turkish and Bulgarian) population. These factors are examined in sections two and three of the report and include the following issues:

1. The legacy of the Bulgarian state policy towards Muslim minorities in the period after the Liberation from Ottoman rule and to the end of socialism. This policy is characterised by two basic features: firstly, the attempts to solve the minority problem by (forced) assimilation and/or expulsion of the Muslim population, viewed as a threat for the territorial integrity of the state (this issue is more extensively discussed in the State of the Art Report, see Lozanova et al. 2005), and secondly, the regional economic policy and especially the impact of nationalisation,

collectivisation of land and industrialisation on the social-economic development of the border regions;

2. The impact of the liberalisation of the human and minority rights, and of the transfer from totalitarian to a rule-of-law state after 1989, on the political mobilisation of minorities and their participation in the political processes and the government;

3. The impact of the economic reforms and the transition from state to private property (privatisation and restitution) on the social-economic status of the border minority regions;

4. Acceleration of the reforms after the beginning of the negotiations for Bulgaria's accession to the EU and the significance of the regional planning and European pre-accession funds for the neutralisation of the heavy social-economic effects of the economy reconstruction and for the preparation of administrative, political, and economic potential in the minority regions.

Section four of the report presents data on the current socio-economic situation in the minority regions, their prospective development, and the cultural mobilisation of the two Muslim groups. It is based on documents, statistical data, experimental analyses and published studies. Despite all this information, it is still insufficient to answer the question about the role of European integration, and particularly of the pre-accession funds on the status and perceptions of Muslim minorities. This is due at least to three factors: 1) Since the Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 does not recognise the existence of "minorities", no official statistics exist on the economic and social status of the population with respect to ethnic and religious characteristics. Most "minority" surveys constitute representative sociological excerpts for the country as a whole. 2) Most development analyses and strategy plans refer to the South Central Region as a whole. Among the six districts of the region, Kardzhali and Smolyan occupy the last places with regard to all socio-economic indicators, i.e. the border minority regions appear to be the most underdeveloped and problematic ones. However, it has become possible to evaluate the concrete parameters of their backwardness only after the publishing of basic data on the so-called "target zones", inclusive of the two minority districts. 3) Finally, the data on the amounts of the pre-accession funds, allocated to Kardzhali and Smolyan districts, turned out to be collected not on a district or regional level but by the Ministries which distribute the money and monitor the implementation of the projects. Furthermore, some projects (under PHARE and ISPA) are sometimes implemented on the territory of more than one district or planning region, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests reports do not always specify the location of the project-winning company under the SAPARD program.

All of the above enhances the importance of the fieldwork results, summarised in section five of the report. They supplement the official data with information on how the minorities and the majority perceive the effects of the ongoing processes on the economic situation of the border regions, the practical aspects of the EU integration policy, the altered role of the local people and their prospects for the future, when a part of united Europe.

2. Background of the case

Two main factors determined the development of Bulgaria during the 20th century and to a great extent the idiosyncrasy of the Bulgarian democratic transition after 1989: the incomplete nation- and state-building processes after liberation from Ottoman rule, and the post-communist heritage characterised by the totalitarian state, coalescence of the Communist Party with all levels of power, state-regulated economy and prevailing state property.

The belated, in comparison to Central and West European countries, and the unfinished restoration, from the viewpoint of the national ideal, of the Bulgarian state within its “historical” boundaries incorporating all territories inhabited by Bulgarians, left a grave imprint on the domestic and foreign state policy in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The fact that the boundaries of the country were recognised not through bilateral negotiations but at a number of international conferences – the Congress of Berlin (1878), the London Conference of Ambassadors (1912), the Treaty of Bucharest (1913) and the Versailles system of 1919 – entailed the feeling that “somebody outside” determined the development of Bulgaria. (Atanasova 2004: 359). The ceaseless endeavours of the Bulgarian governments to achieve the unrealised territorial claims had determined the external political orientation of Bulgaria to those countries that tried to re-design the European map over two World Wars.

The lack of stable democratic traditions should also be noted – the multi-party political system experienced a number of crises (1924, 1934, 1935). The idea of the nation-state, according to which there should be a correspondence between a territory and a people, predetermined the attitude of the state towards the “living heritage” of the Ottoman Empire – compact masses of Turkish populations in Southeastern and Northeastern Bulgaria and Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians) along the southern border of the country (the Rhodope Mountains).

The state policy towards the Turkish and Bulgarian-Muslim minorities during the first half of the 20th century was marked by the following trends (Lozanova et al. 2005): 1) In general their political and cultural-religious rights were observed, which were guaranteed by a number of international treaties and by the fundamental law of the country – the Western-type Constitution of the Principality (the Kingdom after 1908) of Bulgaria, adopted in 1879 (Art. 41, 43). However, the minorities did not have political representation except through the national political parties. 2) The policy towards the two minority groups was differentiated: thus, the Turks were isolated; some insignificant attempts were made to integrate them into Bulgarian society. On the other hand, considerable efforts were directed to the integration of the Muslim Bulgarian population but they did not bring substantial results. What is more, open assimilation measures were occasionally implemented (1912–1913 and 1943). At the same time successive Bulgarian governments sought solution of the “Turkish problem” mainly by encouraging the emigration of Turks and Pomaks to Turkey, sometimes through bilateral agreements. Thus, from the very beginning the displacements of population had a double effect: on the one hand, they were a plausible pretext for reducing the numbers of the minorities, for the “cleansing” of the country from the “foreign” population; on the other hand, they had a purely economic effect, as they led to redistribution of property (basically land and real estate), due to the fact that the migrants lost their property rights (Stanchev; Atanasova 2004: 361). It should be noted that this policy proved to be quite successful (Vassileva 1992: 58–67).

There is no data of specific Bulgarian state economic policy in the regions with compact minority populations until the middle of the 20th century. Obviously the Bulgarian state was reluctant to allocate sufficient funds for the development of the regions inhabited by Turks and Pomaks, which was the cause of the increasing backwardness of these regions (Atanasova 2004:

363). The greater part the Rhodope Mountain inhabitants continued to rely on their traditional sources of income: the seasonal, nomadic sheep-breeding, and after the 1920s on tobacco-growing.

Having become a part of Bulgaria in 1912, the Southern regions were included in the existing administrative-territorial structure of the country¹, and, in spite of the small amount of available data, it may be concluded that the local population preserved its patriarchal social structure and had more confidence in the local (religious) leaders than in the central authorities which remained unwanted. As mentioned in the State of the Art Report, the *Rodina* ('Motherland') association managed to convince some of the Pomaks to accept the ideas of modernisation, but in the end lost its influence as a result of its straightforward assimilation policy, especially during 1940s. In the same vein, although there were Turkish schools financed by the Muslim community and partly by the state, their number was gradually reduced and the quality of education was lower. The outcome of such policies was mass illiteracy among Turks and Pomaks. Such policies had the effect of marginalising and alienating these ethnic groups from the Bulgarian state and contributed to the preservation of their feeling of belonging to Turkey (Atanasova 2004: 363).

It is suggested that the Third Bulgarian Kingdom was by presumption established as a national state of unitary type, characterised by an overwhelming dominance of the majority (Rokkan and Urwin 1982), since the ruling elites deliberately sought political centralisation and ethnic unification. The compact masses of Turkish and Pomak populations were in dangerous proximity to the border with their kin-state, Turkey. This was considered to be a constant source of regional instability. Ethnic cleansing and assimilation were considered to be natural means for the neutralisation of the "Turkish threat". Any idea of broadening the rights of the Turks and Muslim Bulgarians, institutionalised through international treaties, was considered a step towards autonomy and, eventually, secession from the national territory.

The situation of the Turks and Pomaks changed dramatically after 1944. The Sovietisation of the country, the collectivisation of the land and the systematic atheistic policy brought a fundamental change to their way of life.

The policy towards minorities between 1944–1989 was incoherent and determined by the evolution of the views on the nature of the Bulgarian socialist state. Immediately after the coup d'état of September 9, 1944, when power was seized by the *Otechestven Front* (Fatherland Front), the situation of the minorities improved for a short period of time. An issue under consideration was a project for the establishment of a Balkan Federation, following the Soviet model but with "people's – democratic form of government", which was supposed to resolve all ethnic and territorial issues in Southeastern Europe. As early as 1945 the Turks received large cultural autonomy: private Turkish schools were legalised and their status was made equal to that of Bulgarian ones and periodical publications in the Turkish language reappeared. The Pomaks, renamed in 1942, restored their names, and the requirement for the Turkish names to end in "-ov" "-ev" was repealed (Stoyanov 1998: 96–97; 118).

In the late 1940s the "Turkish national minority" was openly mentioned, and it was included in the First Republican Constitution of 1947, which guaranteed equal rights to all

¹ The first Administrative Division of the Principality of Bulgaria Act was adopted in May 1880 and remained in force until 1901, when the second major administrative-territorial restructuring in the country was carried out, and the new status existed for 33 years (until 1934). According to the Act, which was based on Art. 3 of the Tarnovo Constitution, the territory of the country was separated into *okrazi* (provinces), *okolii* (districts) and self – governing municipalities and local councils. The reform of 1934 replaced the existing 12 *okrazi* with 7 *oblasti* (regions) and the territory of the Rhodope Mountains was governed by the center in Plovdiv.

Bulgarian citizens regardless of their nationality, origin, denomination and property, while the propaganda of racial, national or religious hatred was declared to be against the law (Art.71). The initial draft of the 1947 Constitution even envisaged the right of all citizens to freely determine their nationality (in Art. 71), but this proposal was omitted in the final text of the adopted Constitution. (Stoyanov 1998: 98).

The Constitution of 1947 introduced a very important principle enshrined in the 1936 Soviet Constitution: unity of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Thus, the foundations of the legalisation of the totalitarian state and “the leading role of the Party”, introduced by the next constitution of 1971, were laid down. The 1947 Constitution proclaimed that “schools shall belong to the state” and that “the church shall be separated from the state”, as a result of which the Turkish schools fell under state control in 1948, and in 1949 the same happened not only to the Orthodox Church, but also to the Mufti Office, the mosques and remaining Muslim religious institutions.

In compliance with the new Constitution, the government of the Fatherland Front took further steps to put under total control not only the political, but also the economic life of the country. In 1947 the National Assembly adopted the Nationalisation of Private Industrial and Mining Enterprises Act, and in 1948 the Management and Exploitation of Forests Act made all forests the property of the state. Impetus was given to intensive industrialisation, along with the establishment of co-operative farms in the sphere of agriculture.

Meanwhile two important changes in international relations had a direct effect on the situation of the minorities. The first was the fact that Bulgaria and Turkey found themselves on the opposite sides of the Iron Curtain and since the two countries joined antagonist blocks – NATO (1950–1952) and the Warsaw Pact (1955), the Turkish and the Muslim Bulgarian minorities had increasingly been viewed as the “fifth column of the imperialism”. The second change, which was equally important, was the fact that G. Dimitrov and J. B. Tito did not reach agreement on the issue of a Balkan Federation and since the beginning of the 1950s Bulgaria had officially been described as a mono-national state.

The tolerant policy towards ethnic and religious minorities was gradually replaced by harsher measures, especially after the April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1956). The first step was the acceleration of collectivisation, since the initial stages of the reform had led to the transfer of property to the state mainly in the lowland plains (62.5% until 1958). Statistical data show that in 1956, 42 % of Bulgarian Turks were still private owners and 30% of them were included in the co-operative farms. The difference in the situation for the Pomaks was even greater – only 3.44% of them were included in the co-operative farms and 56.9% were private owners. The figures speak unequivocally about the dimension of the collectivisation campaign: at the end of 1958 it had affected 90% of the farmers (Stoyanov 1998: 123, 125). During the 1950s more than 150,000 Turks and Pomaks left Bulgaria as a reaction to the violent collectivisation of land.

Measures for modernisation and economic development of mountainous regions during the 1960s and 1970s, allowed the Turks and Pomaks to stay apart from the migration processes from the villages to towns, which took place in all parts of the country. Thus they managed to preserve their ethnic, cultural and religious specific characteristics. The state enhanced their unwillingness to mix with the majority by creating employment opportunities in the so called *tzehove* (workshops) – partial transfer of small industrial units from towns to villages (the so called ‘domestication of industry’, Creed 1995; Giordano and Kostova 1995: 157–164). In addition, minority groups and regions were granted preferential treatment (higher wages and lower prices). According to some incomplete data from the State Savings Bank, in 1989, regions

with a compact Muslim population held between 1.2 and 1.5 times more savings than the rest of the country. However, given the circumstances (shortages, low consumption rates, etc.), these figures cannot prove that the Muslim population had higher living standards (Stanchev).

The period of intensive industrialisation of the border regions coincided with the new rise of state nationalism during the 1960s when new assimilation policy, with the objective to create a homogeneous socialist nation, began. This policy continued until the end of the 1980s and reached its climax with the “Revival Process”.

Thus, the Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian minorities met the democratic changes in 1989 after a severe ethnic confrontation and political and economic crisis. The relationship between ethnic and religious differences with economic territorial structures could be taken as a typical heritage of state socialism (Anagnostou 2005: 92). Despite being influenced by modernisation, the two Muslim groups remained isolated and confined to the peripheral mountainous regions.

3. European integration and the domestic-regional context of change

The Democratic changes after November 10th, 1989, marked the beginning of the total reconstruction of political and economic life in Bulgaria. The main changes included transition from a totalitarian state to a democratic multiparty system, from a state-regulated planned economy to a market economy, and the building of civil society based on the supremacy of law and the observance of human and minorities’ rights. All these changes comprise the “internal” factors, determining the political, economic and social development of the Muslim minorities’ regions. Of equal importance are the “external” factors, which reflect the changes in the international position of Bulgaria: the country’s participation in regional structures and especially its accession to the EU.

3.1. Changes in the Political System and the Political Mobilisation of the Muslim Minorities

3.1.1. Minority Participation in the Central Legislative and Executive Powers

Prior to 1989, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and its satellite party, the Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BAPU), were the only legal political parties. The transition to democracy after 1989 began with the restoration of the multiparty system and reorganisation of the state institutions, based on two principles: the separation of powers and a republican parliamentary system. Bulgaria was the first Eastern European country to adopt a new constitution (July 1991), which laid the legal foundation for the changes.

As mentioned in the State of the Art Report, the beginning of the Bulgarian transition was marked by strong ethnic tensions caused by the cruel assimilation campaign, which started in the mid-1980s. It had a crucial effect on both the Turkish minority and Bulgarian society in general. On the one hand, the Bulgarian Turks united and mobilised themselves along ethnic lines and in 1990 a political party – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) – was formed, was led from the very beginning by Ahmed Dogan, and mainly represented their interests. On the other hand, post-1989 anti-Communist political parties and civic organisations, most of which united to form the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) coalition, became extremely sensitive to minority issues. During the first years of the transition, it was mainly the ex-Communist Bulgarian

Socialist Party (BSP, former BCP), which continued to use “ethnic scapegoating” and manipulated notions of “Bulgarian national interest” and the “Turkish threat”². BSP questioned the legitimacy of MRF (1990–1991), on the grounds that the Constitution (Art.11.4) and the Political Parties Act contained provisions prohibiting the formation of ethnic-based political parties and organisations. The Constitutional Court ruled in 1992 that MRF is not unconstitutional and can function as a normal party. That decision marked the beginning of the successful Bulgarian ethnic model, based on peaceful ethnic coexistence³. Since then MRF has always been represented in parliament, successfully passing the 4% threshold⁴.

As can be seen from data on the results of the parliamentary elections, displayed in Table 1, MRF became the third strongest party in Bulgaria in the 1990s (both in terms of significance and influence).

Table 1. Parliamentary elections results in Bulgaria after 1989

Elections	BSP Seats (%)	UDF Seats (%)	NMSS Seats (%)	MRF Seats (%)	Others Seats (%)	Voter turnout %
1991	106 (33,14)	110 (34,36)	-	21 (7,55)	-	84,82
1994	125 (43,50)	69 (24,23)	-	15 (5,44)	31 (11,24)	75,34
1997*	58 (22,07)	137 (52,26)	-	19 (7,60)	26 (10,43)	64,11
2001**	48 (17,15)	51 (18,18)	120 (42,74)	21 (7,45)	-	67,03
2005***	82 (33,98)	UDF 20 (8,44) [DSB 17 (7,07)] [BPU 13 (8,93)]	53 (21,83)	34 (14,07)	Ataka (Attack) 21 (8,93)	55,76

In the beginning, MRF supported the democratic forces and the first UDF government led by Philip Dimitrov (1991–1992), as the two parties shared common views on the liberalisation of minority rights and a foreign policy oriented towards the West. Later MRF became dissatisfied

² Nationalist parties appeared in the right sphere of the political spectrum as well but, in spite of their vociferous rhetoric, none of them managed to enter the Parliament with the exception of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), which achieved that by forming a coalition with other parties.

³ A detailed analyses by V. Ganey on the conflicting arguments presented in the course of the constitutional trial that ensued shows how the justices’ anxieties about the possible effects of politicised ethnicity were interwoven into broader debates about the nature of democratic politics in a multiethnic society (Ganey 2004: 75–83). Nevertheless, the “liberal” constitutional interpretation articulated by the Court, was not entirely due to the will to keep the “principle of democratic pluralism”. As D. Anagnostou argues, the role of the Council of Europe in the legalisation of MRF should not be underestimated. In January 1991 Bulgaria submitted the application for membership in the CoE, but invoking the human rights principle, the CoE delegates had expressed their disapproval of the ban on ethnic parties (Anagnostou 2005: 96).

⁴ There is a 4% threshold at the national election for a party to enter the Parliament. Seats in Parliament are distributed proportionally among the parties that have passed this threshold.

* All basic parties participated in the elections in coalitions: United Democratic Forces (Union of the Democratic Forces, Democratic Party, Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BAPU), Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party (BSDP)); Bulgarian Left (BSP and *Ecoglasnost*); National Salvation Alliance (BAPU-Nikola Petkov, MRF, Green Party, New Choice, and the monarchist Federation “Kingdom of Bulgaria”).

** The coalitions were ADF (approximately the same composition); Coalition for Bulgaria (alliance of the left parties); MRF (in coalition with the Liberal Union and the Roma party *Evrroma* (Euroroma)).

*** The coalitions on the last elections: UDF (UDF, Democratic Party, *Gergiovdan* (St. George’s Day), BAPU, National Association–BAPU, Movement for Equal and Social Model); Bulgarian People’s Union (BPU) (Union of Free Democrats, which separated from the UDF, BAPU–People’s Union, IMRO); Coalition for Bulgaria; Coalition *Ataka* (Attack) (the Attack Party and several other nationalist parties, which have not been represented parliamentary until now).

with the government's approach to agrarian reform, and finally withdrew its support and gave a vote of no confidence to the government together with BSP. In December 1992 the President Zhelyu Zhelev entrusted the task of nomination of Prime-Minister-designate to MRF. This led to the election of the L. Berov government, which ruled for almost two years, but did not manage to complete its mandate. The next parliamentary elections in 1994 were won by BSP, which acquired an absolute majority in Parliament. When the single-party government of Zhan Videnov was elected, the MRF and UDF MPs did not participate in the voting process.

By the spring of 1996, the ex-Communists' reluctance to undertake far-reaching structural reforms had contributed to a banking crisis, and after the collapse of the economy and the civic unrest of 1997, the government resigned, preliminary parliamentary elections were called, and the opposition United Democratic Forces (UDF) came to power in a coalition government with BAPU. This produced a strong government backed by a wide majority in the Parliament and a president from the same coalition (Petar Stoyanov, elected in 1996). The new government committed itself to a program of stabilisation of finance, privatisation, and Westernisation through integration with Europe and the joining of NATO. A currency board was introduced in July 1997, which stopped the hyperinflation spiral that had begun in the winter of 1996–1997, and the banking system resumed work.

MRF entirely supported the foreign policy of the government, including its unpopular decision to allow NATO military airplanes into Bulgarian airspace during the Kosovo crisis. At the same time MRF disagreed with UDF economic policy, having being disappointed by the effect of the fast privatisation in the border minority regions, which was unsupported by adequate social measures. In their turn, politicians on the right were disappointed by the MRF reaction and accused Ahmed Dogan trying to isolate and confine the Turkish minority in order to preserve full control over its votes, thus obstructing its integration into Bulgarian society. Güner Tahir formed an alternative National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (1996–1997), which remained a loyal coalition partner of the UDF but did not have enough influence among the Turkish population.

Two important elections dramatically changed the political status quo in the country in 2001. The parliamentary elections were a landslide for a coalition led by the former King Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, or Simeon II, – the National Movement for Simeon the Second (NMSS). The presidential elections in November brought to power Georgi Parvanov, the leader of the BSP. The results displayed the growing gap between popular perceptions of the democratic system and the elite's own agenda: only three months after its formation – the ex-king's Movement achieved victory in 28 of the country's then 30 electoral districts. By declaring that he would “establish and lead a public movement for new ethics in politics and for new economic solutions,” Simeon successfully appealed to the anti-status quo and to the anti-establishment sentiments of the voters. Following several rounds of negotiations, the NMSS and MRF signed an agreement to govern the country together. As a result, for the first time since gaining its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Bulgaria had two ethnic Turks as ministers.

In spite of the criticism from the right, the NMSS–MRF government continued the UDF policy. It finalised privatisation in the banking sector and almost managed to privatise the big state monopolies in the energy and communication sectors; it signed the treaty with which Bulgaria became a NATO member (2004); it managed to complete successfully negotiations and to sign the treaty for accession to the European Union (April 2005). Furthermore, unlike the former government, the NMSS–MRF government implemented aggressive social policy, which decreased unemployment and the relative share of the gray economy. The government did not manage, however, to keep the exaggerated pre-election commitments of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-

Gotha, for “immediate and not token increase of incomes” and for a reduction of the tax burden on businesses. Relations between the coalition partners were not going smoothly either: MRF wanted to acquire larger control over the pre-accession funds and to a great extent managed to achieve this since the minister of agriculture was a member of the MRF; the serious parliamentary crisis during the winter of 2005 though was related to the privatisation of the tobacco monopoly “Bulgartabak”,. This was caused by MRF, which publicly declared support for the privatisation but insisted on real compensation for tobacco producers, most of whom are from the border minority regions.

The results of the last elections in June 2005 proved once again that the greatest challenge to Bulgaria’s electoral system in recent years had been the general public’s declining confidence in the ability of individuals to influence policy making through elections. The parties to the right were divided and were not able to mobilise large support from the voters. The actions of the former Prime-Minister, Ivan Kostov, contributed significantly to that outcome. In 2004 Kostov did his best to transfer the negative effects of his rule to UDF and created a “new” party – Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB) – which displayed some nationalist attitudes. Another weakness of the rightwing politicians was their unwillingness to recognise NMSS as a natural partner, since notwithstanding the fact that NMSS defined itself as a centre-right organisation, in many aspects it was further to the right than UDF and its factions. Despite NMSS losing half its supporters, it still won approximately as many seats in Parliament as the divided right parties put together. Since 1990 BSP had been trying to move away from its Communist legacy, in order to build a modern leftist organisation, and thus to legitimise itself in the international field. Thus it had given up the nationalist rhetoric, and following the 1997 political crisis, the party had supported Western ideas. In 2003, BSP was accepted for full membership of the Socialist International and thus received serious criticisms from its supporters. Eventually, no party managed to win an absolute majority and the bipolar model was substituted by a coalition party model, which emerged with the entry of Simeon II’s and his NMSS party’s entry into politics. This development was facilitated by the fact that the left and right political parties’ positions on key political issues have converged.

Following long and intense negotiation, in the summer of 2005, a three-party coalition (BSP–NMSS–MRF) was formed with the MRF’s mandate. The positions in the government were distributed under the formula 8: 5: 3, which roughly corresponds to the number of parliamentary seats won by the coalition partners.

The direct participation of MRF in the government of the country after the last elections is without precedent. The Movement won 34 seats in Parliament – the greatest number since 1989 – and in the Council of Ministers, headed by the leader of the socialists Sergei Stanishev, MRF received two key ministries, which are directly related to the pre-accession funds: Dzhevdet Chakarov, the Minister of Environment and Waters and Nihat Kabil, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Moreover, for the first time MRF has a Deputy Prime-Minister who is Minister of Disaster Management Policy – the former Deputy–Chairperson of MRF Emel Etem. District governors from MRF were appointed – once again in correspondence with the formula 8: 5: 3.

Another surprising result of the last elections is the success of *Ataka* (Attack) since it is the first time since 1989 that a Bulgarian nationalist party has been represented in Parliament (see Table 1). Attack’s electoral programme deals with painful issues such as low incomes and personal safety, the blame for which is placed on the political class in general and the presence of the “illegitimate Turkish party MRF” in government in particular. Attack stands behind the demonstrations against the appointment of district governors (and deputy-governors) from the MRF quota in “purely Bulgarian” districts, regardless of the fact that some of the nominated

persons are ethnic Bulgarians. The success of nationalistic populism has been generated by public disappointment in the reforms of the last 14 years, and the failure of successive governments, both on the left and the right, to fulfill expectations for a rapid improvement of the Bulgarian economy; and also, paradoxically, by the refusal of the parties demonstrating “moderate” nationalism (BSP and DSB, and even IMRO) to use ethnic confrontation in order to overcome social tensions.⁵

On the other hand, MRF is subject to criticism on the part of Turkish nationalists: the Turkish Democratic Party of Adem Kenan has been active since the autumn of 2005, and during the visit of the Turkish President, A. Sezer, an individual named Menderes Kong n started to gather signatures under an appeal for recognition of the Turkish minority and against the “ethnic party” of Ahmed Dogan. MRF distanced itself from the nationalist actions in both cases; moreover, they were not supported by the Turkish population and were mainly of media effect, while, as a party in the ruling coalition, MRF is well represented on all levels of government.

Although MRF has never declared itself to be an ethnic party and Ahmed Dogan has stated that new members are welcome regardless of their ethnicity or religion, MRF continues to be mainly a party of Bulgarian Turks. Since the beginning of the transition the majority of Muslim Bulgarians from the mixed Blagoevgrad District have voted in support of MRF. The situation in the Smolyan District, however, is different:

Table 2: Parliamentary Elections in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District

	Kardzhali District (seats in Parliament, %)			Smolyan District (seats in Parliament, %)		
	1997	2001	2005	1997	2001	2005
BSP*	- (10.88)	- (7.59)	- (18.79)	1 (18.61)	1 (14.59)	2 (30,82)
UDF	1 (15.33)	- (10.81)	- (2.09)	3 (52.09)	1 (24.73)	-
MRF	5 (59.94)	5 (58.07)	5 (67.32)	- (6.60)	- (6.19)	1 (15,52)
NMSS	-	- (14.65)	- (5.16)	-	2 (41.51)	1 (16,52)
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-

This situation confirms the trend described in the State of the Art Report: the Muslim Bulgarians look for representation through the national political parties, and predominantly through the parties to the right, thus following the general Bulgarian electoral model. At the same time, in contrast with the other regions of the state where – especially at the beginning of the transition – the former Communist Party used to gain more votes in the villages, while the population of the big cities supported the democratic forces in general – the border minority regions displayed the opposite characteristics: BSP had more supporters in the city of Smolyan, while the rest of the municipalities of the district voted “in blue” (supported the “Blues”, or the “Blue party” – the UDF). The Table displaying the results of the last three parliamentary elections shows that since 2001, UDF voters have redirected their support towards NMSS and MRF. This trend can be seen more clearly if the results of the local elections in the districts of Kardzhali and Smolyan are compared.

⁵ The most recent example was the decision of the Central Electoral Commission (based on the Bulgarian Electoral Law, Art. 6. line 2, and the d’Hont system, involving a mathematical model in which positions are shared between different parties on the basis of proportionality) to give all five places in the Parliament from the Kardzhali electoral district to MRF, notwithstanding the fact that the BSP’s candidate – a famous actor, who is at the moment Minister of Culture – received more votes than each of the MRF’s candidates taken individually. In spite of the fact that in the past the local BSP structures alluded to the “Turkish origin” of the MRF’s representatives, this time the protests were only political in their nature.

* For the names of the coalitions – participants in the elections see Table 1.

3.1.2. Participation in the Local authorities

Table 3. Results of the 1999 and 2003 Local Elections in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District

	Kardzhali District				Smolyan District			
	1999		2003		1999		2003	
	Mayors	Seats in LC	Mayors	Seats in LC	Mayors	Seats in LC	Mayors	Seats in LC
BSP	-	15	-	12	-	25	1	20
UDF	1	28	-	10	5	58	2	27
MRF	4	94	7	141	-	11	1	21
NMSS	-	-	-	6	-	-	1	16
Others	2	14	-	14	5	70	5	85

As mentioned in the State of the Art Report, the local authorities in Bulgaria are based on the territorial-administrative division of the country into municipalities and districts, which in general follows the model of the First Bulgarian (Tarnovo) Constitution (1879). The changes in the local government started in 1991 with the adoption of the new Constitution and of the Local Self-government and Local Administration Act. With the Administration Act of 1998 and the Civil Servant Act of 1999 the legislative reform of the civil service has started. The basic territorial and administrative unit in the country is the municipality, while the division into districts is only for coordination between the national government and the municipalities. The municipalities are legal entities, have the right to own property, and have independent budgets. They have authority to deal on a normative and executive level with all issues of local importance, including governance of municipal property, municipal development policies, education, healthcare, culture, provision of local public goods, social aid, environmental protection, and so on. According to the Constitution, the district governors are appointed by the Council of Ministers. The bodies of municipal power are elected: the municipal council as a body of self-government, and the mayor as a body of local executive power.

Before 1989 Bulgarians held the major positions in the local administration of mixed regions. As a result of the changes, the Turks and Muslim Bulgarians are now well represented on all levels of local authorities and the relationships inside the municipal councils are rarely politicised. Contradictions on ethnic grounds are even rarer. Disputes are oriented mostly towards practical issues, such as the need to restructure the local economy and to support private business. The field research found an astonishing unity of the municipal councillors from different political parties when voting on various initiatives, linked with the EU integration.

Although the budgets of the municipalities have been autonomous since 1992, the heaviest problem for the municipal authorities is their funding. Municipal governments have two sources of revenue: central budget subsidies and local and property taxes. Due to the constitutional requirement that all tax rates be approved by the National Assembly, local and property tax rates are defined by each municipality and then adopted en block by parliament. The municipalities have complete control over their own budgets, except when they receive money from the central budget for targeted national programs. Traditionally, most municipalities rely on central government subsidies for many of their needs and in a lot of cases the municipalities governed by mayors belonging to the ruling party or coalition are in a more favourable position.

In 2000 the UDF government took the first cautious step giving local governments more control over their own money, but the process of enhancing local governance is still impeded by

constitutional barriers to the financial autonomy of municipalities, despite the ongoing programs that have been promoting fiscal decentralisation since 2003.

Since MRF participates directly in the central executive power for a second consecutive mandate, the contradictions between the local authorities in Kardzhali District and the central government are reduced to a minimum⁶. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the municipalities need additional resources in order to co-finance the PHARE and SAPARD programs in which they participate actively. Another problem, partially resolved by the new development plans for the 2007–2013 period, was that local authorities expected the enforcement of old socialist decrees that guaranteed border and mountainous regions a privileged regime (a set of economic and social measures, such as higher salaries, etc.).

3.2. Protection of Human Rights and Minority Rights in Bulgaria

Political changes in Bulgaria at the end of 1989 and the subsequent democratisation enabled a full restoration of the rights of ethnic and religious communities. The fundamental law of the state – the 1991 Constitution – emphasises the protection of fundamental human rights. The Constitution also guarantees freedoms of speech, press, assembly, internal movement, and emigration. In addition, it guarantees the right to privacy and bars racial, ethnic, gender, and other forms of discrimination (Art. 6). It specifically protects economic freedom (Art. 19) and the right to property (Art. 17). It is true that the 1991 Constitution does not use the term “minority”. The main argument behind this is that official recognition of the term would create grounds for claims that go beyond the sphere of human rights and involve certain complications in the sphere of interstate relations. Thus, instead of collective rights of the minorities, the Constitution protects the individual rights of every citizen. Several of its articles guarantee to persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic communities the right to preserve their culture, to practice their religion and to speak their language (Art. 36, section 2; Art. 37).

Prior to the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, the state undertook concrete measures to restore the rights of the Bulgarian Turks who had been subjected to legal persecution and forced assimilation. In January 1990, the government granted amnesty to 31 people who had been imprisoned since 1984 for opposing the assimilation campaign. In March 1990, the Parliament passed legislation that allowed ethnic Turks and Muslim Bulgarians to restore their original names, which had been forcibly changed, and in 1991 some 600,000 Turks, Pomaks, Roma and Tatars used this right. Another statute granted amnesty to all persons sued in connection with the assimilation campaign of 1984–1989: in November 1990 Article 273 of the Criminal Code, which criminalised “spreading untrue allegations” that lead to a “dissatisfaction with the government” or “confusion within society,” and other similarly vaguely worded offences was repealed. An amnesty was declared for those imprisoned under the law. The Parliament amended Article 108, which addresses “anti-state agitation and propaganda,” so that the provision now only prohibits the advocacy of violence, “fascism or another anti-democratic ideology”.

In December 1990, the rights of ethnic Turks to choose their own names, speak Turkish, and practice Islam were fully restored. Approximately 60 Turks who had been imprisoned for “treason and espionage” were freed. The assimilation campaign was officially recognised as an illegal act and violation of basic human rights. However, human rights organisations have

⁶ This was not the case in the 1990s when MRF was in power in the Kardzhali district but did not participate in the central government, which was run either by BSP or by UDF. For details, see Anagnostou 2005: 97–98.

complained that local prosecutors and magistrates sometimes fail to vigorously pursue crimes committed against minorities.

Two decrees of the Council of Ministers (No. 29, 1990 and No. 170, 1991) and the so-called Dogan Act (1992) constituted an indemnity package dealing with the housing, property and employment of Bulgarian citizens who had emigrated to Turkey in 1989 and had later returned. In conformity with these acts, no less than 3,000 houses were returned to their previous owners (Nedeva 1993: 134–135). The next step for regulation of the economic and social rights of the Turkish citizens was undertaken by the second UDF government. In the course of Ivan Kostov's visit in Turkey in November 1998 the two states signed an agreement about the welfare payments by the Bulgarian government to the Bulgarian citizens permanently residing in Turkey. The agreement affects some 40,000–50,000 Bulgarian Turks who migrated to Turkey after May 1989.

Again, during the rule of the second UDF government, President Petar Stoyanov signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe in October 1997, and on February 18, 1999 the Bulgarian National Assembly adopted a law for the ratification of the Convention. In order to synchronise the Bulgarian legislation with that of the European Union, Bulgaria has signed and ratified all internationally-adopted conventions on human rights protection (including the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

The institutional base, which should guarantee the protection of these rights, has been set up. In December 1997 the UDF government established the National Council for Ethnic and Demographic Issues within the Council of Ministers (recently renamed into National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues). The Council is a state-public institution with the task to coordinate the cooperation between government institutions and NGOs, aimed at the implementation of the national policy on ethnic and demographic issues, and issues of migration. The level of minority rights respect and protection in Bulgaria is monitored by a number of non-governmental watchdogs concerned with human rights, and by international organisations.

Special provisions exist regulating the right of the members of the minorities to learn their mother language and to secure their religious rights. As early as the beginning of the 1990s, MRF insisted that instruction in Turkish language should be introduced as part of the regular curriculum in all Bulgarian schools. The demand caused a Bulgarian nationalist backlash. As a result the Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Public Education Act in October 1991, which stipulated that Turkish could be taught only outside state schools. Several months later the newly appointed minister of education revised this policy. In view of the fact that most of the schools in Bulgaria are controlled by the municipalities and not by the state, the minister instituted Turkish instruction in public schools on an extracurricular basis. After 1989 two colleges for the training of Turkish teachers, as well as four religious high schools and a High Islamic Institute were established in Bulgaria. The teaching of the Turkish language and literature was restored at the universities of Sofia and Shumen (Nitzova 1997: 729–739; Atanasova 2004: 394–397). In another positive development, the state-owned national television has launched a short Turkish-language newscast.

In December 2002, the National Assembly adopted the new Religions Act, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of religious beliefs (according to existing data, 84.9 % of the population is Orthodox Christian; another 13.1 % is Muslim; 0.8 %, Jewish; 0.7 %, Catholic; 0.3 %, Protestant; and 0.2 %, other). The interference of the state in the internal organisation of the religious communities is declared inadmissible. Although it is a step forward in comparison with the old Denominations Act of 1949, the new statute was strongly criticised by religious groups and associations working in the field of human rights for its preferential

treatment of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (of note is that, according to Art.13, Sec. 3 of the 1991 Constitution, the Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the “traditional” religion in Bulgaria). Furthermore, there are fears related to the wide powers of the Denominations Directorate within the Council of Ministers, especially with regard to its exclusive prerogatives to deliver “expert opinions” before the court on issues of registration, a procedure which seems selective, sluggish, and non-transparent (IRF Report 2004).

3.3. Transition from centrally planned economy to market-based economy

3.3.1. Privatisation of industrial enterprises and its social effect

The economic impact of the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-based economy on the Muslim minorities in Kardzhali District and Smolyan District can be analysed within the larger framework of economic transformation in Bulgaria. The first step of the changes was the transfer of property. Since 1989, privatisation has been carried out in three main forms: restitution of land and urban property; cash sale of state and municipal assets; and mass privatisation programs, including privatisation through vouchers (Stanchev 2004). The restitution of land and urban property was regulated by four 1992 and one 1998 restitution acts, the 1991 Ownership and Use of Agricultural Land Act (the “Land Restitution Act,”) as well as by implementing provisions. The 1992 Transformation and Privatization of State-Owned and Municipal-Owned Enterprises Act (or the “Privatization Act,” as it is often referred to) regulates the other methods of privatisation; by-laws contain provisions on the different procedures for cash sales.

The actual privatisation process began slowly and the transition proved to be a lengthy and costly process. There were many factors contributing to this. One of the important ones was the slow overcoming of the post-Communist legacy in the economic structures, and as a result the gross domestic product (GDP) continued to decrease well into 1997. The second UDF government (1997–2001) introduced fiscal austerity and undertook the necessary regulative and administrative measures to accelerate the reforms. The privatisation procedures were simplified and accelerated. The government intended to privatise smaller mining, manufacturing, and food processing companies under a less rigorous timetable, and the general trend was for the state to withdraw from the economy. By October 1997, approximately 43 % of the assets of these smaller companies had been exchanged for coupons held by citizens or managed for them by investment funds. In all, approximately 32-35 % of the long-term assets of the state-owned enterprises had been privatised by the end of 1997, and until the end of its rule in 2001, UDF managed to privatise almost all small and medium sized enterprises, and a significant part of the large ones.

The fast privatisation had a crucial effect on the local economy in the regions inhabited by the Muslim minorities. It had also a very high social price. Unemployment increased drastically, especially after insolvent firms that traditionally employed large numbers of people were closed. That was especially the case for the mining and ore processing industry, which was the basic source of income for the local population – Turks and Muslim Bulgarians.

The UDF strategy of fast privatisation and state withdrawal from economy also had a strong political effect and led to an open conflict with MRF – the Movement criticised the UDF government and insisted on a regionally-specific strategy, in which the central state should assist economic development of peripheral municipalities (Anagnostou 2005: 100–103). On the other

hand, the liberalisation of the economy and macroeconomic indicators were developing in compliance with the requirements of the EU integration and negotiation process.

3.3.2. Agrarian reform and its influence on regional development

Agrarian reform in Bulgaria consisted of two major processes carried out in parallel: land reform and structural reform. As a result of the land reform program, the socialist bi-modal agricultural structure — large state co-operatives (TKZS) and small household plots — had been destroyed and replaced by new structures: individual private farms and farming companies, or cooperatives, established by owners who usually did not cultivate the restituted lands but preferred to grant them on a lease (Kopeva, Mihailov 1999). The restitution of property over agricultural land was completed in 2001, while only 80 % of the forests have been restituted, as the restitution process of forestry started much later.

According to the 1992 census, the prevailing part of the landless population had ethnic minority identity. However, the statistical data reveal that the Turkish population in the Kardzhali District region has restored its ownership over the land and its members do not face legal difficulties in proving their property rights. Conversely, the Muslim Bulgarians come second, after the Roma, as a community that does not own or owns an insignificant amount of agricultural land (Kopeva, Mihaylov 1999). Probably the reason for that situation is the fact described in the previous report – almost 70% of the territory of the Smolyan District is covered by forests, while the agricultural land does not exceed 25%. Furthermore, although the agrarian reform is de-facto finished, its formalisation through the issuing of proper deeds is still in progress. The field research revealed that the aged Muslim Bulgarians in the region are not in a hurry to show the notarial deeds for their restituted lands. This attitude is partially caused by their unwillingness to face the bureaucratic administration, as well as by the fact that collectivisation was never really felt strongly in the highland areas – the agricultural lands are small and separated by large distances, so even after the collectivisation all individuals knew very well what were “their own lands”. And yet, the unclear situation with the legal documents is an obstacle for both the development of the agricultural land market and of the long-term leases to farming companies.

Land restitution is often identified by local elites as a precondition for solving the problems in agriculture. The practice has proved that the issue is not that simple. It has become clear that the basic problems are caused by the quality of the soil and the climatic conditions, which allow the cultivation of a limited number of plant sorts (mainly potatoes and tobacco). The land owned by Turks and Muslim Bulgarians as a rule is eroded, deforested or insufficient to provide for a living. Thus, agriculture proved not to be a viable solution to poverty and unemployment in Southern Bulgaria. What is more, tobacco production, which provided the basic means of living for more than half of the Muslim population in the Rhodope Mountains, has suffered a severe crisis.

3.4. EU Integration and regional development

The most important external factor stimulating the democratic changes in Bulgaria and directly influencing the development of the minority regions is the European integration and the European regional policy in particular.

At the beginning of the transition, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community and the signing of the Convention on Trade, Business and Economic Relations in May, 1990, were important steps, through which Bulgaria managed to overcome its political and economic isolation, caused by the assimilation campaign against the Bulgarian Turks. The PHARE Program was opened for Bulgaria, and in the first half of the 1990s several governments and the Bulgarian Parliament confirmed the country's desire to become a member of the European Community (1990–1992), and the European Union respectively (after 1993). The preliminary consultations in relation to the accession conditions were started by Luben Berov's Cabinet (1993). The next steps were made by the government of Zhan Videnov (in March 1995 the Council of Ministers adopted Decree No 66 whereby a special European integration mechanism, involving a Government Committee, a Coordinating Commission, and a Secretariat on European Integration at the Council of Ministers, were created; in December 1995 the Bulgarian Parliament adopted a decision for Bulgaria's official application for EU membership), but the financial collapse and the following political crisis postponed for several years the possibility for Bulgaria to meet the Copenhagen criteria, adopted in June 1993.

Agenda 2000 of July 1997 mentioned the desire of Bulgaria to apply for membership, but the opinion expressed was that the country was still not ready to begin negotiations for accession. Meanwhile the Ivan Kostov government prepared a National Strategy on Bulgaria's Accession to EU (1998) and a National Program for the Adoption of the *Acquis Communautaire* (NPAA), which set out in detail the necessary first steps and actions for the country; the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed (1997) and ratified (1999). During the rule of the second UDF government, European integration became a basic priority for Bulgaria, and that idea was accepted with consensus by all political forces represented in Parliament.

Immediately after the decision of the European Council to start negotiations for accession with Bulgaria and five other countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Malta), adopted in Helsinki at the end of 1999, the Council of Ministers issued Decree No 3 upon which the Chief Negotiator of Bulgaria, the core team for negotiations, and work groups according to negotiations' chapters were appointed, and the Parliament established a Commission on European Integration (2000).

The next important steps towards accession were made in 2002: the regular report of the European Commission recognised Bulgaria as a "functioning market economy" and supported its desire to join the EU in 2007 (officially confirmed at the meetings in Prague and Copenhagen at the end of 2002; at that time the so-called Roadmap for accession was adopted). The accession treaty was signed in Luxembourg on April 26, 2005, and the so-called "safeguard clauses" were incorporated, which guarantee the possibility for a review of "serious problems that may arise before accession or in the three years after accession". These clauses allow the EU to temporarily exclude Bulgaria from certain policy areas from 2007 until 2010 if the country implements reforms too slowly. Besides, the EU will continue to closely monitor Bulgaria's progress in the implementation of the reforms.

Within the five-year period (2000–2004), during which Bulgaria managed to implement the Copenhagen criteria to a level sufficient for it to start and complete the accession

negotiations, the country received support through the PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD programs. The increased funding from the EU, the requirement for co-financing from Bulgaria, and the policy of continuity between the pre-accession and structural funds on the one hand and the cohesion fund on the other, which Bulgaria will start to receive after 2007, necessitated concrete institutional and legislative changes, which were mentioned in the previous report.

3.4.1. Legislative amendments and regional development planning

In 2000 the Council of Ministers (Decree No 145/27.07.2000) defined six planning regions (corresponding to the level NUTS II of the EU), as bases for planning, execution and monitoring of regional interventions in the decentralised system, consistent with the practice of EU regional policy. Consequently, the changes were regulated with the new Regional Development Act of February 2004 (State Gazette, No 14/20.02.04), which substituted the former statute of 1999 (SG, 26/1999 г.). The objectives of the Act are “establishment of conditions for balanced and stable development of the regions in the Republic of Bulgaria” and “...reduction of interregional and intraregional differences in the economic development of the country”. The Act envisages two types of regional divisions:

Six planning regions (the fifth one is the South Central one, which includes the two districts, subject of the research: Smolyan and Kardzhali), and

Target zones within each planning region, which correspond to the degree of development. These are: economic development areas, industrial decline areas, underdeveloped border areas, underdeveloped rural areas, and underdeveloped mountainous areas. The target zones are defined as the territorial foundation for the implementation of regional policy and include the territories of one or more neighbouring municipalities. It is important to notice that a single municipality can be included in more than one target zone, if the municipality meets the criteria for (Art. 7, Sec. 7).

The development of national and regional strategies for regional development started as early as 1999–2000, and those strategies were based on an economic analysis of the planning regions; definition of the priorities for development; as well as the means through which the desired results must be achieved. National, regional and municipal development plans for the 2000–2006 period were created on the basis of the strategies; the plans envisage the funds necessary for their implementation, in correspondence with the state budget.

3.4.2. Implementation of the pre-accession funds in the South Central Region (SCR)

Of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the EU, the Bulgarian administration has most experience with the PHARE program. The total budget of the program for Bulgaria is 2,400 million Euro and contracts for ninety-three projects have been signed; 12,9% of the projects and 10,2% (245,619 Euro) of the budget funds have been received by the six regions of the SCR. The Smolyan district has 2.2% of the projects and has received 0.9% of the funds (for the country) and the Kardzhali district – 1.1% of the projects and the funds (Ikonomichesko 2003).

There are no statistics on the implementation of the aid under the SAPARD program because the projects are individual and are accounted for under measures for the country as a whole. Bulgaria has been a party to the annual SAPARD programs from 2000 to 2003 inclusive, and the general budget under these four annual programs has been 291.8 million Euro, the contracts signed have been for projects with the value of 234.8 million Euro, while the de-facto

utilised funds have amounted to 78.4 million Euro. The projects from the ISPA program, which are realised, albeit only partially, on the territory of SCR, have the value of 15 921.5 thousand €; in addition to that an ecologically oriented project is being implemented by the Smolyan and Kardzhali municipalities (24 471 and 14 547 Euro respectively).

4. Changing opportunities and constraints for minorities

4.1. Social-economic characteristics of the Smolyan and Kardzhali Districts of SC Region

The territory of the two districts subject to the research (Smolyan and Kardzhali) covers an area of 6 402 sq. km. (3 209 sq. km. and 3 192.9 sq. km. respectively). The Kardzhali District (KD) includes seven municipalities and the Smolyan District (SD), ten.

According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI) data for 2004, the population of the two districts is 292 893 people, while according to the last census (2001) the population was 302 143, i.e. the demographic trends in the two districts follow the negative model of the country as a whole. Over the period 1995–1999 the population of SCR decreased by 4.8%. This trend continued over the next three years (1999–2001), and the greatest decrease was in KD – 18.8% (9.5% for SD); this was caused by negative natural population growth and by emigration. Yet the decrease in the population in SCR occurred at a slower rate than in the rest of the regions; the birth rate for the 1999–2001 period increased from 8.9 to 9.1‰.

The population density of the KD and SD is the lowest for the SCR – only 8.3% and 7% of the population, respectively, live there and most of this is in the rural areas. The two districts are the only ones in SCR where the urban population is below or near 50%: 32.7% for Kardzhali and 50% for Smolyan.

Table 4. Population of Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts in December, 2004, by Place of Residence

	Total	Place of residence	
		In city/town	In village
Bulgaria	7 761 049	5 431 846	2 329 203
SCR	1 933 271	1 269 908	663 363
Smolyan D	133 015	70 034	62 981
Kardzhali D	159 878	65 159	94 719

As mentioned in the previous report, the population is of mixed character: The Turks are the majority in KD (in all the municipalities of the district) – 61.6 %; the second largest group are the Christian Bulgarians – 34%, and the smallest group are the Muslim Bulgarians - approximately 4.2%, although it is possible that an insignificant part of the latter group (approximately 0.7%) define themselves as Turkish. The number of the individuals living in the Smolyan District who self-identify as Bulgarians is 87.6% but only 29.6% declare that they belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church (21.4% in Kardzhali District), while 41.9% self-identify themselves as Muslims (69.6% in KD), and the percentage of those who refuse to declare religious affiliation is relatively high (11%). The Turks in Smolyan district are 4.4%, living in

three villages in the Devin-Dospat area. According to the third criterion used in the 2001 census – mother tongue – Bulgarian is the native language for 34.7% of the population of the Kardzhali district, while the Turkish speaking individuals are 61.53%; in the Smolyan district the numbers are 92.2% and 4.1% respectively. The comparison of the data from the three indicators leads to the conclusion that in SD the majority of residents are Muslim Bulgarians, a considerable number of whom are with latent religious affinity, or prefer not to declare their affiliation; the second largest group are Christian Bulgarians; and a small number of Turks also live in the district (in the three villages). Therefore, the Bulgarian national majority is “local minority” in both the districts subject to the research.

SD and KD are located in the Rhodope Mountains. The infrastructure is relatively well developed, but its overall condition is unsatisfactory. As a result of the natural environment, the inherited social-economic structure, the past policies, and the dynamics of the development in the transition period, well displayed disproportions can be observed in the economic development, employment, incomes, and living standards of the populations of the two districts, both with regard to the indicators for the SCR, and for the country in general. This can be displayed by the preliminary territorial range of the target zones (i.e. the areas that need aid), determined in April 2005 on the basis of the data from the NSI and in correspondence with the Regional Development Act after its amendments and supplements (SG 31/12.04.2005).

Table 5. Target Zones in Smolyan and Kardzhali Districts

	underdeveloped rural areas	underdeveloped border areas	underdeveloped mountainous areas	Economic development areas	industrial decline area
SD Total	4	6	10	-	2
Banite	x		x		
Borino	x	x	x		
Devin	x	x	x		
Dospat		x	x		
Zlatograd		x	x		
Madan			x		x
Nedelino			x		
Rudozem		x	x		x
Smolyan		x	x		
Chepelare	x		x		
KD Total	2	2	6	-	2
Ardino	x		x		
Dzhebel			x		
Kirkovo		x	x		
Krumovgrad		x	x		
Kardzhali					x
Momchilgrad			x		x
Chernoochene	x		x		

As it can be seen from the table 5, there is not a single municipality in either district, which can be included in the most prospective group of “economic development areas”. Furthermore, most of the municipalities (with the exception of the towns of Kardzhali and Dzhebel) fall under more than one target zone. Almost all municipalities (all ten in the SD and six out of seven in the KD) are classified as “underdeveloped mountainous areas”, characterised by an average altitude of 600 meters above the sea level, low degree of transport technical and social infrastructure development, limited possibilities for employment, high levels of

unemployment, low incomes, and depopulation. The second significant group – “underdeveloped border areas” – includes six municipalities from SD and two from KD, which are situated on the border with Greece, and also are characterised by low social-economic development. Six municipalities (four in SD and two in KD) are “underdeveloped rural areas”, and four towns (Madan and Rudozem in SD, and Kardzhali and Momchilgrad in KD) are classified as “industrial decline areas”, characterised by a high relative share of old industries (mining and ore-processing), worsened economic results, and high percentage of unemployment accompanying the structural reform.

The location of the KD and SD is exceptionally favourable for CBC with Greece, which is highly relied upon to overcome the isolation of the two districts in the context of the European integration of the country. The greatest problem at the moment is the absence of border check-points on their territory, despite the existing intergovernmental agreements under PHARE–CBC.

The basic indicators for the social-economic condition and for the adaptability of KD and SD to the changing demands of the economic activity are: their contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Bulgaria, the situation in the labour market, the structure of the economy, the degree of penetration of the private sector and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the amount of the direct foreign investments.

The SCR contribution to the GDP of the country has been relatively constant: during the period 1999–2003 the region was second in significance for the Bulgarian economy after the South West Region, having a relative share of 20% (21% for 1999, 20.89% for 2000 and 20.64% for 2001), and real growth of 9.39% for 2001. The analyses made for the preparation of the National Plan for Development envisage that this trend will continue until 2006. On the other hand, the relative share of the KD and SD is lower than that of the other four districts in the SCR (under 20% for 2001) and has dropped by 1.88% for KD, and has increased by 2.2% for the SD.

Labour Market. Less than 700, 000 individuals are engaged in the different economic spheres of the SCR (690, 400 for 2000). Until 2000, the trend for the country in general and for the SCR in particular was a decrease of employment and increase in unemployment. Over the period 1999–2000 the registered unemployment in SCR increased from 16,7 % to 17,9 %, while in both of the districts, subject to the research, the climax came in 2001–2002. This negative trend was to a great extent related to the restructuring of the economy. The public sector offered less employment possibilities because of the ongoing privatisation, while the private sector was incapable of accommodating all individuals, dismissed from the public sector. Still, in 2000, 52.7% of the employees in SCR worked for the private sector.

In order to describe the economic characteristics of the SCR, it is important to display the employment structure in accordance with the sectors of the economy. The share of the employed in agriculture, forestry, and industry has decreased. The greatest number of individuals work in the services sector. There is some increase in employment in industry in the KD and SD, but as a result of the lack of data on the movement of the employed in the agricultural sector, we can only conclude that the percentage in this sector is rather high; as can be seen in the table, this percentage is near and above fifty. It is important to highlight the lower level of unemployment in the KD in comparison with that for the country. This situation is caused mainly by the high number of tailoring firms in the district (approximately fifty to sixty). On the other hand, SD occupies one of the last places in the national table of employment, the lowest unemployment rates being registered in the centre – Smolyan – and in the small town of Chepelare.

Table 6. Labour Market and Unemployment

	Relative share of the employees in the industry compared to the total number of employed individuals (%)				Employees in the agriculture	Unemployment (%)				
	2000	2001	2002	2003		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Bulgaria	39.98	39.76	39.50	38.35	17.2	16.97	17.88	17.32	16.27	13.51
KD:										
Ardino	38.39	40.63	38.38	41.60	41.8	29.28	30.52	27.95	32.02	24.56
Dzhebel	22.09	45.93	50.19	56.28	48.9	17.80	19.96	18.50	23.63	21.70
Kirkovo	34.97	37.47	39.70	39.48	62.6	15.94	19.98	18.70	24.03	18.77
Krumovgrad	37.38	39.63	47.58	47.62	54.2	16.08	16.48	16.20	22.06	18.78
Kardzhali	48.79	49.47	50.94	48.67	18.8	11.77	11.55	10.88	12.47	10.54
Momchilgrad	48.95	57.27	55.82	58.80	41.10	14.11	11.93	14.79	19.29	14.45
Chernoochene	26.69	30.04	33.69	42.15	53.2	10.31	11.73	10.41	11.28	8.84
SD:										
Banite	17.79	18.29	20.05	18.98	73.2	23.24	23.30	23.02	27.19	25.33
Borino	22.13	33.44	42.46	41.94	56.8	44.01	51.47	47.74	41.99	32.79
Devin	35.22	39.09	36.33	34.71	39.1	30.89	34.34	34.69	33.01	28.99
Dospat	58.42	63.88	57.70	54.63	56.5	30.62	32.14	29.91	25.27	17.81
Zlatograd	48.69	50.49	58.38	60.82	28.1	24.62	28.01	21.87	22.12	15.29
Madan	55.54	55.29	59.64	56.65	41.7	35.10	26.82	28.14	29.98	26.27
Nedelino	40.55	43.18	41.22	42.82	55.9	38.74	38.04	31.87	27.94	24.96
Rudozem	58.21	59.85	58.87	60.11	28.5	28.07	23.98	29.15	33.37	25.04
Smolyan	34.09	38.99	34.31	34.96	24.5	17.62	18.18	18.11	19.48	16.10
Chepelare	26.46	32.13	29.43	33.28	24.8	15.72	19.51	20.44	21.11	18.29

Agriculture, a traditional occupation in the past, is in decline in the SD as a result of the abrupt transition to private property and fragmentation of land. In 2000 the sector held the last place among the six basic sectors of the district's economy in terms of sales; trade, industry, construction, transport, and tourism were ahead of it. In KD the agriculture has preserved its monoculture nature – the region is a well-known producer of oriental tobacco brands. Tobacco growing is the basic activity and source of income in five out of the six municipalities in the district. For example, in Krumovgrad municipality, more than 50% of the active population works in that sphere.

Industry in SCR produced 34.05 % of the gross added value (GAV) in the region in 2001 and 34.2% in 2003. The distribution of the production of the industrial enterprises in the SCR is an important indicator for the industrial profile of the region, which is characterised with an, albeit insignificant, increase of the relative share of the food industry at the expense of other industrial branches. In 2001 the basic products of the region were foods, beverages, and tobacco – 23.06%. Metallurgy and the production of metal goods had a relatively stable rate of development and market demand (internal and foreign) – their share of the production was 11.5%. The production of machines (smelting and metal processing) and resource extracting industries displayed a similar level of performance, losing their role as factors determining the economic structure; their production had reduced to 11.3%. These trends and indicators did not change significantly during the next couple of years.

The number of SMEs in the SCR has been constantly increasing in recent years. This is a typical trend for the country in general and a natural result of the restructuring of the economy. There were 53 809 registered companies at the end of 2000, which employed 30% of the total number of employees. At the same time approximately 93.5 % of the SMEs had one to ten employees. The KD and SD have the lowest concentration of SMEs – 7% and 8% respectively of

all companies in the SCR are located on their territories and the number of the employed in the private sector is the lowest for the country.

The situation regarding **direct foreign investments** is not good either. In 2001 the SCR took fifth place among the six planning regions in accordance with the distribution of direct foreign investments; it had 5% or 132, 462.7 million USD. The distribution within the region is extremely uneven. The KD is one place from the bottom for the country as a whole. Over the period 1992–2001 it managed to attract investments of 2.4 million USD. In 2001 the share of the KD in total SCR investments was only 3%, while the share of the SD was even smaller – 1%; according to the foreign investments indicator, SD holds 22nd place in the country. Over the period 1992–2001 it managed to attract investments of 12.9 million USD, which was an insignificantly small amount.

The analysts' assessment of the social-economic situation in the SCR is that the region has potential for development but there are considerable disproportions between the most developed districts – Plovdiv and Stara Zagora – and the most underdeveloped ones – Kardzhali and Smolyan, the latter being included among the areas that are in need of aid. As a result of this the National Plan for Economic Development (2000–2006) proposes the region receive investment support for economic and social approximation, financed under the PHARE program. The SCR was the first region for which a Regional Innovation Strategy was developed (2001–2004). On the basis of the regional development plan, a SWOT-analysis was made of the advantages and disadvantages, of the possibilities for and the limitations of the social-economic development of KD and SD, and came to the following generalised results:

Advantages: preserved nature; presence of resources and a potential for development of tourism, logging and wood-processing, textile, power production etc; existing facilities in the mining industry; presence of qualified labour force; well developed power supply network.

Disadvantages: high unemployment; poor infrastructure and road network, which is not in compliance with the European safety and comfort standards of travelling; increase of the incomes received in kind; low purchasing capacity of the population; absence of own investment capital for the local entrepreneurs; ineffective institutional structure to support the development of the private initiative; difficult access to bank credits.

Possibilities: the opening of new border check-points will increase the economic attractiveness of the region; the building of a road network in the municipalities will contribute to the improvement of the transport communications and the normal functioning of the economy; the introduction of technologies to prevent the production of industrial waste in logging and wood-processing industries; reform in the structure of the production of goods by directing it to products based on the local agriculture and resource extracting industry, in order a complete production and technological line to be created; establishment of exchange and commodity markets for agricultural products; stimulation of the producers of organic food; search of prospects for establishment of joint ventures with foreign participation; expansion of the offering of tourist services through encouragement of rural, hunting, fishing, speleological, mountain trekking, and other alternative types of tourism.

Risks: the region is distant and peripheral; the investment in regional projects are not financially guaranteed; the dependency on the central budget financing increases; the liquidation of entire sectors as extraction of uranium, electronics, mining; chain reaction emigration of people and enterprises; insufficiently developed infrastructure; absence of markets for part of the producers; agriculture cannot be the only alternative on the territory of KD and SD.

The analysis of the regional economy displays that it is in a recreational and defensive strategic position, which means that it cannot rely on stabilisation without centralised

investments and implementation of centralised programs; the gaps between advantages and disadvantages are too great, which means that the closing of the gaps requires a significant amount of time; the level of risk is high, which implies a serious hazard for the implementation of the strategic programs for development of the region.

According to the SWOT analysis, the two fundamental approaches for recreation and stabilisation of the local economy are:

Resource approach, based on the utilisation of the resources existing in the region. This approach can be developed in two directions: organisation of production of goods with a higher degree of processing of the raw materials, and commercialisation of the resources, which have not been used until now. This approach is for the local authorities and institutions.

Investment approach, relying on commitments on the part of the central authorities to the region, while the local authorities and institutions are to propose, direct, and lobby for centralised investments and to create conditions for their realisation.

4.2. Cultural mobilisation of Turks and Muslim Bulgarians in Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts

The constitutional and legislative regulation of the language and religious rights of minorities, including in the sphere of education, is referred to above. Studying of the Turkish language (by the Turks) and religious education (for the Bulgarian- Muslims and the Turks) are evaluated by the representatives of the minorities as a means of preservation of their group cultural identity and coherence, as well as being a way for them to acquire the right of equal opportunities by reforming previously discriminatory educational policies (Atanassova 2004: 393). However, this is only the first point at issue. The other is related to granting an equal access to education for minorities as the majority, which would thus put both groups on an equal level regarding future career prospects. These two aspects of the situation of minority education are analysed below, mainly on the basis of sociological surveys, as no sufficient statistical data is available.

4.2.1. Studying of Turkish Language

The supplements to Art. 8, Sec. 2 of the National Education Act (SG No 36/1998), legalised the practice introduced by Decree No 183 of September 1994, of the Council of Ministers: “Pupils, whose mother language is not Bulgarian shall have the right, apart from the mandatory study of Bulgarian language, to study their mother language in the municipal schools...”; and the term “mother language” is defined broadly in another legal document (Rules on the Application of the National Education Act, Art. 5, Sec.4) as “...the language in which the child communicates in the family before the child starts to go to school.”

The studying of Turkish language is an optional subject from first to eighth grade (four hours per week, outside the regular curriculum). Teaching programs, textbooks, and dictionaries are prepared and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, and the children are provided with textbooks free of charge, i.e. they are paid for by the municipality. The opinion of parents, though, is that the textbooks are out of date (they have not been changed since 1993) and insufficient in number. Another problem is the requirement for a minimum number of pupils willing to study Turkish in order for a group to be created – the general requirement for the country is for thirteen children, while in small settlements the number of the pupils may be lower

(down to seven) if the corresponding municipal council has adopted decision to that effect. All this impedes the process of teaching and creates dissatisfaction among the parents.

In 1999 the Turkish language became a part of the curriculum after 8th grade (72 school hours in ninth and tenth grade, and 108 school hours in eleventh and twelfth); it was included among the so-called mandatory-selection subjects (MSS – i.e. a list of subjects from which the student is obliged to pick a certain number) and once again restrictions on the number of students in a group were introduced (no less than eleven and no more than 20). The Turkish language became a MSS from the first grade in the 2002–2003 school year, the other two in the list were English language and choreography i.e. today the parents have to choose if their children will study their mother language or one of the other two subjects. According to a representative sociological survey, this is one of the reasons for the difference among the number of children who wish to study their mother language (30%) and the actual number of children who in fact do so (only 19.5% of the Turkish pupils are studying Turkish in school); the parents prefer their children to study the English language, which gives them better prospects for the future.

According to the statistical data, in the 2001–2002 school year, the Turkish language was studied by 34,860 pupils in 520 schools, and taught by 703 teachers, most of whom (over 80%) were licensed to teach that subject.

Apart from the municipal schools, where Turkish is studied as a “mother language”, it is also taught as foreign language in the Muslim denominational schools in Shumen, Russe, and Momchilgrad, and in specialist private schools: “Balkan School” of the “Bulgarian Colleges” Foundation and the Private Language School “Druzhiba” of the Bulgarian-Turkish Democratic Foundation.

4.2.2. Religious education of the Muslim Minorities

The religious education of the Muslim community children is an important stage of their socialisation, giving them the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their religious obligations. Immediately after 1989, the local *mesdjit* (small mosques) and mosques resumed the traditional “teaching of the Koran” (including recitations of the holy book in Arabic, explanation of the rules of the prayer, and of the fundamental principles of the religion) for the children in the primary grades of school, and even for those too young to go to school. The classes were taught by local *hodja* (teachers) outside the school curriculum. Ultimately, an exam had to be taken before the local *ulema* (the body of scholars of Muslim religion and law) and the children were gradually becoming part of the local community of believers. There are no data on the number of children who have finished this type of training, but especially in the first years this approach was wide-spread. The textbooks and other necessary equipment were provided by the Office of the Chief Mufti.

In the 1997–1998 school year, after more than fifty years of suspension, the general schools reintroduced religion as an optional subject, and the “Religion-Islam” discipline was introduced as optional subjects for grades one to four in the following year (as part of the basic subject). In order for the subject to be included in the curriculum at least 12 pupils were required. Over the period 1999–2001, 3215 children in 78 settlements underwent experimental teaching. The teaching programs were created by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in cooperation with the Office of the Chief Mufti, the latter providing the textbooks. The “Secondary Education” Department of MES has had an expert on religion since 2001 (Doklad 2003).

In 2002, the amendments in Educational Degree, Basic Educational Minimum, and Curriculum Act, made the subject “Religion” a MSS in the cultural-educational sphere of “Social Sciences, Civil Education and Religion” for grades one to twelve.

Until 2002 this form of education was financed by the central budget and the Office of the Chief Mufti. After the reform of 2002, the task was transferred to the municipalities, and the lack of funds there meant that the discipline could not be studied even if there were individuals willing to attend such classes.

As early as 1991, the National Assembly adopted a decision, which created three denominational Islamic schools in Shumen, Russe and Momchilgrad (with a branch in the village of Rogozche, Dzhebel Region, Eastern Rhodopes). The teaching there is from ninth to twelfth grade under a curriculum approved by the MES and the Office of the Chief Mufti. The denominational schools teach general disciplines (as in the regular high schools) and eight special subjects in the sphere of religion (history of religion, history of Islam, science of Koran, Arab language, etc.). The students do not have to pay for tuition, their textbooks and equipment are provided free of charge and are approved by MES and the Office of Chief Mufti. At the end of their studies the students receive a diploma of secondary education from MES and a diploma for *imam hatip* from the Office of the Chief Mufti, which allows them to work as imams in the mosques. The students are predominantly boys (138 in Momchilgrad in 2004), while the branch in Rogozche teaches girls (87 in 2004).

The applicants for the denominational schools outweigh the places available and a selection procedure is being implemented, giving priority to orphans and children from poor families from the regions of Gotse Delchev, Blagoevgrad, Devin, Dospat, Pazardzhik, Madan and Rudozem; these children are provided with board and lodging.

The students and the teachers are both Turks and Muslim Bulgarians. The teachers are mainly alumni of the secondary denominational schools and of the High Islamic Institute in Sofia; many of them have additional qualifications acquired in Turkey, or come from Turkey. The educational process is controlled by the regional inspectors on education of MES and by the Office of the Chief Mufti; no malpractices have been found until now.

The Islamic denominational schools are financed by the Office of the Chief Mufti, the *Dyanet Vakfi* (Directorate on Denominations of the Republic of Turkey), and by donations.

In addition, the so-called “illegal Islamic schools” exist; usually under the name “Koran Teaching” (two of them are on the territory of SD – in Dospat and Ustina). Such schools can be licensed only by the Bulgarian Denomination Directorate and a class must last for at least 2–3 months. Most of these classes have been licensed only by the Office of the Chief Mufti (Sarnitsa) or remained unlicensed and covered up as “boarding houses”. The courses in the illegal schools are nine months long and those who have taken them do not receive any certification for an acquired qualification or degree. The unclear status of that type of teaching creates suspicions that these classes are dedicated to “radical Islam”, that *Jihad* and “religious intolerance” are propagated. According to a journalist investigation (“Capital” Weekly of August 2004), and statements of high-ranking Muslim clerics (who are in opposition to the Chief Mufti), these illegal schools are funded by the “*al-Waqf al-Islami*” Foundation, which was banned in Saudi Arabia in 2001, and which prior to that, in the beginning of the 1990s, had financed the construction of mosques in Northeastern Bulgaria. These allegations have not been proven until now, but it is sure that the ideological controversy over the issue as to whether these schools teach Hanifi Islam, traditional for Bulgarian Muslims, or the fundamentalist Wahabi form, is actually a cover for political and economic interests.

The Muslims have one more form of religious teaching, the so-called “Summer Classes in Islam”, which started in 1998 and are organised by the Office of the Chief Mufti during the summer holiday. The wide-spread interest in these classes can be displayed by the fact that in 2001 in the region of Smolyan they were attended by 1,000 children from 45 settlements.

4.2.3. Educational Level of the Muslim Minorities

According to the national statistical data from 2001, the educational structure of the Bulgarian population is clearly differentiated. Table 7 represents basic data on the population of KD and SD in respect to the level of education. As these data do not incorporate ethnic and religious belonging, and in many of the settlement the population is of mixed character, the data from the national representative survey on the educational situation among minorities could also be referred to (Project 2003).

Table 7. Population in accordance with level of education at March 31, 2001.

	University	Bachelor	High school	Secondary School	Primary school	Illiterate	Child	Not displayed
Bulgaria	716 863	333 671	2 826 821	2 049 443	1 372 722	132 888	471 686	24 807
KD								
Ardino	255	312	3 178	4 875	3 599	589	794	49
Dzhebel	167	154	1 757	3 278	2 264	456	549	36
Kirkovo	346	503	4 544	8 948	7 040	1 167	1 621	51
Krumovgrad	401	580	3 868	6 750	5 597	1 201	1 404	126
Kardzhali	4 237	3 285	20 861	20 139	13 158	3 206	4 552	392
Momchilgrad	376	457	3 981	5 971	4 250	994	1 099	57
Chernoochene	105	184	1 772	4 077	2 938	786	668	39
SD								
Banite	149	223	1 867	1 945	1 969	285	307	20
Borino	100	93	1 200	1 227	1 130	106	249	4
Devin	486	581	4 472	4 857	3 391	384	798	41
Dospat	299	255	3 317	3 198	2 345	139	713	10
Zlatograd	458	467	4 863	3 864	3 170	369	826	25
Madan	315	298	4 295	4 431	3 350	309	763	51
Nedelino	220	224	2 855	2 459	2 120	214	615	8
Rudozem	266	324	3 610	3 101	2 618	187	744	25
Smolyan	3 645	2 596	16 760	12 534	8 448	640	2 404	203
Chepelare	484	416	3 185	2 892	1 693	79	454	29

According to the sociological surveys, more than 97% of the well-educated individuals in the country are Bulgarians, while the share of university educated Turks among all the university educated population is approximately 1.2 % (the Muslim Bulgarians are not included in the results). This means that only 2.7 % of the Turkish population is has a university education. In particular, it is disturbing that the share of those who do not even have primary education is 5.6%, and most of them are absolutely illiterate (3, 45 %). The situation looks even worse, given the fact that school education is free of charge and accessible to all citizens.

The problems start even below the school level – approximately 16% of the Turkish children have not been to kindergarten (6.8% for the Bulgarians). Approximately 16%–18% of the parents explain that situation with their inability to pay the required taxes and fees. The absence of pre-school teaching has a permanent effect on the teaching and the integration of the

children in the schools. Approximately 46% of Turks do not know the Bulgarian alphabet when they start school (neither do 17.2% of Bulgarians) and 59.3% of the Turkish children require additional classes in the Bulgarian language. As a result, the average grades of the children (both belonging to the minorities and the majority) who have not been in kindergarten are significantly lower.

Another serious problem is the fact that, unlike the Bulgarians, most of the children belonging to minorities tend to leave school before reaching the age of 16. According to the NSI data, in the 2003–2004 school year 2.93% of the pupils in KD and 0.86% in the SD had stopped to go to school, the main explanations being: departure abroad (approximately 55% of the respondents in KD and 25 % in SD) or family considerations (17% and 48% respectively) (Novatorski 2005). The NGOs have a positive experience in overcoming this situation: IMIR, for example, has, for six years, been implementing the stipend program “Rodopi” (Rhodopes) for Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian children living on the border and remote regions in the Eastern and Western Rhodopes. The program has proved that the parents of the children who perform excellently in school need insignificant encouragement to send their talented kids to the nearby town/city to continue their education in elite high schools; and almost 90% of these children move on into university education.

To sum up, the overall situation is disturbing, as the lower education level places the Turks and the Muslim Bulgarians at a disadvantage in the labour market, and is one of the reasons for the high levels of unemployment among them. Most of them have secondary education, which is not enough to make them competitive. Further, the low incomes from unqualified labour create a barrier to securing a better education for the future generations.

5. Local actor responses and perceptions

Three members of IMIR’s team (Dr. Evgenia Troeva-Grigorova, Dr. Iva Kyurkchieva and Dr. Bojidar Alexiev) have conducted the field research in the South Central region of Bulgaria. They have been working in two districts for a total of 15 days – 10 days in Kardzhali district and 5 days in Smolyan district. They have conducted 42 interviews with 44 persons – Turks, Pomaks and Bulgarians, of which 17 were females and 27 were males. The team has selected respondents in accordance with the goals of the project, formulated by the WP2 and has also considered the table, indicating the approximate correlation between representatives of political, economic, civil and business circles, linked to the issues of regional development and the role of the EU integration policies in the minority populated border regions. Yet the correlation between representatives of various social-professional categories had to be somewhat changed in the course of the work to provide a more accurate presentation of the Bulgarian situation. Specifically, we had to increase the number of interviews with persons, working in the municipal and district administration, involved in directly “servicing” EU funded projects. Most of these employees have undergone special training. A serious difficulty was to find more politicians who do not hold office and informal leaders of the minority communities. Most important reason for this is that the MRF is a part of the governing coalition for the second time in a row, and almost its whole political resource is directly involved in the government.

5.1. Economic development of the region and EU integration

The opinion of the respondents about the socio-economic development of the Kardzhali and Smolyan districts almost fully corresponds to the expert evaluations. Unemployment, underdeveloped infrastructure, weak interest of investors – both domestic and foreign, isolation and emigration were named as the main problems. Some respondents also noted the limited possibilities of enterprises for introduction of new technologies, low-skilled work force, and closure of small manufacturing, which used to provide employment in the mountain areas. In agricultural regions, the main problems are small size and segmentation of arable land, which makes the use of agricultural machines difficult. Lack of initiative and disbelief that people can improve their situation on their own, have also been mentioned as important obstacles.

The economic situation began to improve in 2000–2001, and especially after 2003, when the government of NMSS–MRF took several concrete measures (respondents named the following as the most important: in 7 out of 10 municipalities of Smolyan district, enterprises were granted significant tax cuts, which increased the investments from other parts of the country; subsidies from the fund of the program for regional development “Rhodopes”).

Although the revival of the regional economic development roughly corresponds to the arrival of pre-accession funds to the region, not all interviewees are convinced that there is a direct link between the two. The main reason is that few believe that the project as realised so far – mainly from the PHARE program – will have long-term effects (“No long-term jobs are being created”) and the interviewees from the private sector stress that they are not encouraged to develop their businesses or to make a profit. The fact is that the effect of pre-accession funds is negligible outside the local administration, NGOs and few businesses, which are involved in the work on EU funded projects.

However, most respondents believe that it is logical that EU funds are directed above all towards the building of civil society structures, training of personnel and providing employment to the most vulnerable social categories – the so-called “from people to people” PHARE projects. The general conclusion is that local people will not feel any significant improvements in their daily lives until the real economic revival is first stimulated and then achieved.

5.2. The effect of pre-accession EU programs on local administration and the non-governmental sector

The regular arrival of pre-accession funds to KD and SD since 1999–2000 has altered the roles of municipal (elected) and district (appointed by the central government) authorities and their administrations, and has led to personnel and structural changes.

The general feeling was that employees in the municipal and district administration were on average very young. Most of them had a technical or humanitarian educational background, and in addition also a Masters degree (or at least a specialisation) in economics. Some of the administrators have also undergone special training, financed by PHARE, on how to prepare and write projects. The special attention given to the education and training of people employed in the administration is a consequence of the fact that one of the main reasons for the small number of projects funded from pre-accession programs was the lack of trained personnel (both in terms of quantity and quality). This partially explains why until recently the better-educated ethnic Bulgarian minority in Kardzhali and Smolyan districts was more active regarding these programs. Lately, however, a visible effort has been made to increase the education level of ethnic minorities – a task listed as one of the priorities of MRF on the last parliamentary

elections. Another reason for training of local administrators is that they have to be prepared for the implementation of structural funds and to be familiar with the rules for strategic planning. These rules have been used in practice as preparation of the municipal plans for development in the 2007–2013 period.

One of the visible results of the structural changes in municipalities and in district administration was the establishment of special departments for Euro-integration. Another is the hiring of experts to regularly follow information on forthcoming projects, and then forward the relevant information to all interested persons and institutions. The information from the government is spread also during the so-called “informative days” for employees of the district administration and through brochures. According to the opinion of respondents, however, the latter is expensive, slow and ineffective.

A very positive development we noticed is that in all activities, linked with providing information on EU projects, a very good cooperation exists between NGOs and municipalities. All respondents have highlighted the importance of informal contacts and personal initiative during work. Useful working links have been established also with colleagues in relevant ministries. A serious weakness, though, was also mentioned – a bad practice, typical at least for the time being before the introduction of the new Law on State Servants - every time a minister was changed, even during one government term, the teams trained for work on the EU funds left, and precious time was lost before new cadres familiarised themselves with the work.

Some respondents also noted the astonishing unity of municipal councillors from different political parties when voting on various initiatives linked with EU integration. Yet, others hinted that some councillors and MPs from the region are not concerned with the general interest, but only that of “their people” (most likely, the respondent had in mind MPs and councillors from MRF, who mainly supported their party members).

Municipalities also prepare, win and realise their own projects – mostly linked with the efforts to overcome the ecological problems and problems of unemployment in former mining and steel-producing areas (“Construction of the regional centre for waste-management in Kardzhali”; “Partnership for the cleaner river Arda”; in Rudozem a shoe-making factory was opened in a reconstructed building and with modern equipment). The result of these projects was positive, since it improved the environment and provided dozens of jobs, which is very important in a region with high unemployment.

5.3. Influence of EU pre-accession programs on SME and agricultural producers

The high degree of political mobilisation of the Turks in Kardzhali District was not accompanied by the same degree of economic mobilisation. Notwithstanding the MRF’s concerns and efforts related to the district – or maybe as a result of them – the dominant part of the local population continues to rely on state subsidies, tobacco growing, and small tailoring enterprises founded by Greek and Turkish businessmen.

The young individuals from Kardzhali district – both from the majority and from the minority – prefer to work abroad in Western Europe and mainly invest their money in real estate; only a small number of the local inhabitants start their own business. The general impression is that the Bulgarians are more active economically – both in terms of founding small and middle size enterprises, and in participation in European projects, regardless of the logical assumption that the Turks have greater possibilities through MRF. Most probably this passive behaviour is a result of the lack of enough trained specialists. (Therefore, the creation of a well-educated local administrative elite from the Turkish minority should be noted as one of the positive changes.)

Approximately the same situation can be observed in Smolyan District. On the one hand, one can see an inert and scepticism in the future elder generation, while on the other, the young specialists, who return after they have finished their education or have worked abroad, with the intention to realise their achievements in their native country. In general, the economic activity in this district is higher both among the Christian and Muslim Bulgarians.

Local elites rely strongly on European funds, and yet, Smolyan District also seems to display slow utilisation of the opportunities granted under SAPARD for improvement of the quality of agricultural products – most projects here are related to the development of rural tourism. As a result, the local MRF activists have undertaken the task to inform the producers about the conditions of the program (because the agricultural minister is representative of MRF in a second successive Government) and to convince them that in order to survive the producers must at least take the following initial steps: to obtain the documents proving ownership over land, to organise themselves in associations in order to group the separated pieces of land and the small animal-breeding farms. This practical approach will probably increase the MRF's influence in the areas inhabited by Muslim Bulgarians; the extent of the increase will become clear in the forthcoming local elections. It must be emphasised that the economic interests in Smolyan District enhance political mobilisation.

Two groups of private entrepreneurs have so far been applying for funding through pre-accession programs. One group consists of people, who have lost their jobs, but who are not merely looking to survive, but are trying to find their own “niche” of activity. In the second group fall persons who already have their own small and medium-size business, and hope either to expand it or to improve the quality of their production in order to obtain the necessary certificates, without which they will not be able to operate after 2007. All those, who had their projects approved, are satisfied with what has been achieved and intend to participate also in other appropriate EU programs. They, however, just like the people whose projects were not approved, or who did not meet the application criteria, commented on difficulties they encountered in the procedure. The most problematic requirement is that those agricultural producers, wishing to apply to the program, need to have more arable land, more livestock and larger turnover than is realistically possible in the Rhodopes. Local agricultural producers also experience difficulties in coming up with the initial capital, since the program funding covers 50% of the investment only after the completion of the project and evaluation of the result. This is why many people view SAPARD with scepticism. Finding a loan with low interest rates and a longer paying off period is another problem.

Despite the difficulties, respondents note that participation in the EU programs raises the self-confidence and prestige of the people. They become more open to new ideas and begin to think more positively. Several respondents commented that training for participation in pre-accession programs is “a very good opportunity to change our mentality,” that “people become more European” and that “Europe becomes much closer”. The internal barriers are crossed, and people are not afraid any more that they will not be able to deal with the new situation after accession to the EU. The effects of the pre-accession assistance are evaluated positively, but it seems that there are much higher expectations for the structural funds.

The opportunities for CBC with Greece, created by the pre-accession funds, are utilised mainly through joint projects on a municipal level in the spheres of ecology, telecommunications, or exchange of information about the activities of Bulgarian and Greek companies. The plans for opening of new border check-points have not resulted in positive developments until now. It is interesting that the contacts between the representatives of Muslim elites on both sides of the

border do not appear to create feelings of ethnic or religious solidarity and they obviously prefer to stay “on their own side”.

5.4. Expected effect of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007 on the economic development of the region

The general opinion is that Bulgaria’s accession to the EU will have a predominantly positive effect on the economic development of the country and the region in particular. This is due above all to two factors: the introduction of “European norms” and the structural funds. On the other hand, there are serious concerns that accession will also lead to mass bankruptcy of small enterprises, which do not meet the EU criteria for quality of production and working conditions. Even the expected rise of the standard of living is seen as an unfavourable factor for small-sized proprietors. The examples set forward are small textile manufactures, which are currently attractive for investors from neighbouring Turkey and Greece mainly because of cheap labour.

Another possible difficulty is the need to quickly restructure the agricultural production. Respondents note that the importance of traditional tobacco cultivation will progressively decrease and farmers will have to shift to alternative agriculture, and especially to eco-production.

5.5. Relations between the Bulgarian majority and the Turkish and Muslim Bulgarian minorities.

When asked to comment on relations between the Bulgarian majority and Turkish and Bulgarian Muslim minorities in connection with the problems of regional development or participation in EU projects, all respondents categorically described it as “partnership.” The members of working teams are selected strictly on the basis of their professional qualities, not because of their ethnic or religious belongings. Business representatives also view qualification as the most important criterion when hiring their employees. In NGOs dealing with the issues of inter-ethnic relations and prevention of ethnic conflicts, representatives of main ethnic groups work together. (However, it seems that Bulgarians are more active in NGOs.)

The basic reason is the solidarity created by the common interest in improving the economic status of the district. Another factor frequently mentioned is the long-standing tradition of peaceful cohabitation in the two districts with mixed population. On the other hand, some – not only from the majority, but also from the Turkish minority – imply that many Bulgarians leave Kardzhali and resettle in the central regions of the country, and the one to blame is the “party MRF”, which has occupied all power positions. The Bulgarian Muslims express dissatisfaction with the “construction of churches” in the area of Nedelino, where Muslims mainly live and where the well-known priest of Pomak origin father Saraev “converts” local Muslims to Christianity. Some Bulgarians expressed certain worries about the increased interest of Turkish businesspersons in buying property in Bulgaria.

Certain contradictions and concealed tensions do exist, but people deliberately do not comment on them. Many note that more time will have to pass before ethnic and religious differences will entirely cease to matter.

Minority representatives believe that now, their rights are protected and respected in Bulgaria. Despite that, they note that “there is still room for improving” and that “after our EU accession, such problems will finally disappear.” The representatives of the local minorities

definitely develop the feeling that there are supranational (European) power structures, which are not indifferent to the economic welfare of the region and to some extent could guarantee that their rights would be respected. In the words of one of the respondents, the EU accession will offer additional guarantees for the effective realisation of young people's potential "without outright or concealed forms of ethnic discrimination."

5.6. Identities and Europe

"Ethnic" and "cultural-religious" differences are not publicly demonstrated and, as stated, are of no importance when members of the majority and minority work together on pre-accession programs. There are, however, some differences in "self-awareness" and "declaration" of identity. When asked to grade their identities according to importance, Bulgarians usually place the national and civil identity at the top, followed by regional ("Rhodopian") or local identity, and in the end, they also mention, with or without reservation, their European identity. Turks and Bulgarian Muslims seem to put stress on the regional and civil identity. (In fact, Turks prioritise their ethnic (Turkish) identity, while Muslim Bulgarians their religious (Muslim) identity.)

The question if and how much they view themselves as "Europeans", triggered a dual reaction. At first, there was a sense of offence, as the question was understood as excluding Bulgaria from the European historic and cultural community. The division Europe/Asia represents an important element of the national identity, especially in the regions with Turkish populations. There is no equation between "Europe" and "European Union."

"Europe" is inseparably linked with norms, laws, freedom of choice and better possibilities for professional development. The qualities described as "European" are tolerance, responsibility, order, and higher quality of work.

For most of the respondents (from all groups), acquiring the "European identity" and "a sense that they are a part of Europe" was equal to "obtaining a European self-awareness." This self-awareness has both symbolic and had real dimensions, such as a higher standard of living, freedom of choice and better personal and professional development.

The role of the EU in this process is evaluated in two ways. For some, more pessimistically, changes for better can only come from outside the country, by being "forced" upon Bulgarians after EU accession. Others note that "the EU will not raise their salaries" and therefore "we should go towards Europe, and not wait for Europe to come to us."

Pre-accession programs are seen as a first step towards this positive development. As noted, the programs have helped those involved in them to change their mentality for the better. They are satisfied with their experience and the results they have achieved, and are proud that their activities have contributed to the development of their city and region. The rest are more sceptical.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents stated that even after EU membership, local people "should try not to lose [...] their culture and identity" (Respondent 9, Respondent 29, Respondent 38). This attitude is typical of the Muslim Bulgarians who hope to become a part of a larger diversity and thus escape the humiliating 'historical' perception of their religious identity by the majority.

Generally speaking, the field research outlined two patterns of attitude towards and perceptions of EU integration: a "more optimistic" and a "more pessimistic" one. The optimistic approach is found amongst politicians (both on local and central level), persons employed in municipal and district administration, representatives of non-governmental and civil sector, and among those individuals and entrepreneurs, who participated in projects. People (mainly from the

private sector), who were left outside of these processes – as stated above, not only for subjective reasons – are more pessimistic. They worry that EU accession will not only bring positive developments (in particular, “European” rules and better business environment), but also is representative of a danger: the higher quality and lower prices of products the Bulgarian producers will not be able to compete with.

6. Concluding remarks: relationship between ethnic-national identity and territory

Two basic factors influence the changes in the two districts of Kardzhali and Smolyan, which are inhabited mainly by Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, namely: the liberalisation of minority rights and the restructuring of the local economy. These factors stimulate the political and cultural mobilisation of the two Muslim minorities, change their economic status, and create new foundations for their attitude towards the state and the Bulgarian national majority. It should be noted that the changes that occurred after 1989 have been viewed as part of the overall Europeanisation of the country, and as such they have been welcomed and positively accepted by the representatives of the minorities. The penetration of the pre-accession funds in the region has been perceived in the same context: as part of the new political situation, and yet, it is probably too early to assess their overall impact.

The changes in the two minority districts, subject to the research, which outline the specific “Bulgarian” characteristics of the project, are the following:

1) Since 1989 both Muslim communities, Turks and Bulgarian Muslims, have displayed strong **political mobilisation**.

For the Turks this mobilisation is related to MRF, to which they have delegated almost unlimited rights (more than 60% of the Turks vote for MRF on parliamentary and local elections) to represent them on all levels of the legislative (the Parliament and the local councils) and executive power (the central government and the mayor institution). One of the reasons for the Turks to recognise MRF as “their own” party is the fact that it was established and is now led by community leaders who have opposed the policy of forced assimilation of the socialist state. Very important also is the fact that MRF demonstrates real concerns for the socio-economic situation in the border minority regions and has always held the opinion that these regions must be assisted by the state at least until they find an appropriate alternative for the local economy (mainly tobacco growing). Another factor is that, regardless of the criticism against MRF for being “ethnically based”, coming from both right and left parties, MRF has always conducted realistic and moderate policies of minority right protection in compliance with the Bulgarian and International Law. The MRF’s political platform is built upon the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Bulgarian state, and therefore MRF has a significant contribution to the development of the model of peaceful ethnic tension elimination. The latter attracts the members of the Turkish minority without aspirations for territorial separation, especially on the eve of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, because they are satisfied not only by the degree of their participation in the government, but also by their civil freedoms and the possibility to freely maintain contacts with their “motherland”.

The political mobilisation of the Bulgarian Muslim minority manifests itself in different ways. At first glance the failure of the attempts for the formation of a “Pomak” party (discussed

in the State of the Art Report), and the absence of absolute confidence in MRF among the Muslims in the Smolyan District, whose political behaviour follows the general Bulgarian electoral model, are a result of the “absence of internal group cohesion”, as frequently reported by the researchers. The reality is not exactly the same. The refusal of the Bulgarian Muslims to recognize MRF as their own party is a result of the reputation of MRF being a “Turkish” party, while the differentiation between the two Muslim groups on ethnic grounds was the basic process determining their relations in 20th century, and this differentiation was enhanced deliberately by the policy of the Bulgarian state. As some of the respondents imply in their interviews, the Muslim Bulgarians, living in the Middle Rhodopes, would not wish to be criticised by the majority for being “Turkicised” by MRF. Therefore, since the beginning of the transition, the Bulgarian Muslims have supported the natural defender of their rights – the Union of the Democratic Forces. In spite of the economic collapse of the region, caused by the intensive privatisation carried out by the second UDF Government, the Muslim Bulgarians continue to support parties on the right of the political spectrum, relying not so much on the party programs, but on local individuals whom they know well and in whom they believe. As the Turks in Kardzhali District do, the Bulgarian Muslims also exercise total control over their local authorities, regardless of the fact that their representatives belong to different parties.

2) Notwithstanding the lack of concrete data on the **effect of the pre-accession funds**, it can be concluded, that in Kardzhali and Smolyan Districts they have led to the creation of a new administrative capacity, prepared to plan and manage the local economic policy; the negative consequences of the closing of the unprofitable socialist enterprises (mainly in the mining and processing industries) have been mitigated to some extent through the creation of new, although insufficient in number, employment opportunities; the local businessmen and agricultural producers are encouraged to introduce new technical equipment and new production technologies, in order to adapt themselves to the competitive economic environment, which they will enter after accession to the EU.

3) The representatives of both minorities, Turkish and Muslim Bulgarians, think that their **minority rights** are guaranteed by the Bulgarian legislation and are respected, despite the fact that some disturbing phenomena are noticed. Besides, they are convinced that there are supranational (European) power structures, which are not indifferent to the economic welfare of the minority regions and which could guarantee that their rights would be respected in the future as well.

4) On the other hand, as far as conclusions could be drawn from the attitude of the Turks to the study of their mother tongue, the **linguistic mobilisation** of the community is of less significance than the political one. At the same time the Turks, and especially the Bulgarian Muslims, insist on the teaching of religion: **religious education** is considered extremely important for the spiritual development of the young people – at least in religious families, – and for Muslim Bulgarians it plays an important role in contributing to the cohesion of the community and the formation of community’s identity.

5) The overall impression is that all respondents representing the political and cultural elites, and the business circles, relate their future to their region and its economic and cultural prosperity. The **relations among representatives of the majority and the minorities**, engaged

with the issues of regional development and European integration, are characterised by a dominating spirit of cooperation.

The respondents – both from the majority and from the minorities – have not openly displayed their **ethnic, religious, and even party affiliation**. This fact proves *per se* that the ethnic and religious differences are still important enough to be silently omitted, although mutual tolerance is always emphasised.

When asked how they **visualise Europe** and how they see **their place in it**, all respondents from the majority and from the minorities are unanimous on two issues: Bulgaria has always been part of the European historical and cultural space, and its citizens are Europeans. Yet, they confess that they do not feel to be ‘real Europeans’ as something is lacking (the most frequently mentioned factors are the different – ‘Oriental’ – attitudes towards labour and the low incomes). There is also unanimity that upon entering Europe, all communities must preserve their specific (national, ethnic, cultural, etc. characteristics.)

Finally, to summarise the results of the research with regard to the expected four “ideal forms” of (re)configuration of minority-majority interests and identities in subnational regions, which are distinguished by their relationship to the central state and the way they view the connection between the cultural, political and territorial unit and variable conceptions of the EU, then the Bulgarian model will definitely not belong to the first two types (national-state and national-civic forms). The members of the local elites tend to present the situation in the region within the framework of the third type (regional-civic form), which probably corresponds to their idea of the “ideal” model they wish to achieve. It is characterised by: extensive regional co-operation, support for decentralisation, as well as increasingly institutionalised regional-local alliances *across* political parties and *across* national-ethnic communities; local-subnational government increasingly operating as a representative of the region rather than of the ethnic or national community; minority-majority interests and politics defined by growing convergence around economic and regional development objectives; declining politicisation of cultural identity issues and their re-orientation away and dissociation from the state; identification with Europe is widespread and the EU is seen as an entity where various cultural identities can flourish but is seen primarily as a source of more efficient government, economic competence and regional competitiveness. At the same time, especially in Kardzhali District, where the Bulgarian national majority is actually a local minority and MRF has strong positions in the local government, some characteristics of the fourth type (regional-ethnic form) can be detected: a dominant minority in the region or in areas within the region, which has established or seeks to establish control over local government and economic resources; local government operating as representative of the ethnic community rather than of the local population. On the other hand, some important characteristics are absent: the interests of the minority are definitely not aligned with a national state centre outside Bulgaria; the minority does not express aspirations for regional political autonomy, and while speaking about that issue, MRF opposes not only any separatist claims, but also any demands for collective minority rights, now and then raised by other Turkish nationalist organisations without serious support among the Turkish population.

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